

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for receiving and processing suggestions for a company, comprising:

- a central portal for receiving a new suggestion ~~suggestions~~ from a submitting party on behalf of a receiving party;

- a plurality of innovation zones within said receiving party to which said new suggestion ~~suggestions~~ can be routed, wherein said innovation zones comprise any of:

- a point of entry for employees within a specific business unit in a larger entity for submission of suggestions related to said business unit;

- a point of entry for motivated submitters with an idea about how to change a business practice of said company;

- a central point of entry for ideas and suggestions;

- a point of entry for ideas on improving a specific aspect of said company;

- and

- a point of entry for third party submissions;

- a routing mechanism ~~that routes~~ for routing said new suggestion ~~suggestions~~ to one or more of said innovation zones in response to an interaction with said submitting party;

- at least one central database into which said new suggestion is ~~suggestions are~~ categorized based upon key words;

- a viewing mechanism ~~for viewing said suggestions to allow~~ allowing for peer viewing ~~and/or~~ and comment before a final decision is made regarding the new suggestion ~~suggestions~~;

- a response module that automatically sends an acknowledgement to said submitting party when ~~[[a]]~~ the new suggestion is submitted by said submitting party, wherein said acknowledgement comprises any of a Web based response and an email message;

a search mechanism that automatically searches for previously-submitted suggestions that are potentially related to the new suggestion and displays the results of the search to the submitting party;

a selection mechanism allowing the submitting party to select any of the displayed previously-submitted suggestions that the submitting party determines to be similar to the new suggestion;

a linking module that links said new suggestion to any of the displayed previously-submitted suggestions that are selected by the submitting party, whereby the selected previously-submitted suggestions will be cross-referenced with the new suggestion; for linking said suggestions to related suggestions, wherein related suggestions are cross-referenced to minimize entry of duplicate suggestions;

an acknowledgement module for automatic emailing of specific types of suggestions to specific areas of responsibility within said company;

a status module that tracks progression of a suggestion through a review, comment, and approval process; and

a statistics module that reports cumulative submissions in a predetermined format; wherein said routing mechanism comprises a page based dialog; and wherein said central portal comprises a Web page.

2. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for receiving and processing suggestions, comprising:

a central portal for receiving a new suggestion suggestions from a submitting party on behalf of a receiving party;

a plurality of innovation zones within said receiving party to which said new suggestion suggestions can be routed;

a routing mechanism that routes said new suggestion suggestions to one or more of said innovation zones in response to an interaction with said submitting party; and

a search mechanism that automatically searches for previously-submitted suggestions that are potentially related to the new suggestion and displays the results of the search to the submitting party; and

a selection mechanism allowing the submitting party to comment on any of the displayed previously-submitted for viewing said suggestions, to allow peer viewing and/or comment before a final decision is made regarding the suggestions, and allowing the submitting party to select any of the displayed previously-submitted suggestions that the submitting party determines to be similar to the new suggestion, whereby the new suggestion is linked to any previously-submitted suggestions that are selected by the submitting party, such that the selected previously-submitted suggestions will be cross-referenced with the new suggestion.

3. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 2, further comprising:
at least one central database into which said suggestions are categorized based upon key words.
4. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein said routing mechanism comprises a page based dialog.
5. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein said central portal comprises a Web page.

Claim 6. (Canceled)

7. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 2, further comprising:
a response module that automatically sends an acknowledgement to said submitting party when a suggestion is submitted by said submitting party.
8. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 7, wherein said acknowledgement comprises any of a Web based response and an email message.
9. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein said innovation zones comprise any of:

a point of entry for employees within a specific business unit in a larger entity for submission of suggestions related to said business unit;

a point of entry for motivated submitters with an idea about how to change a business practice;

a central point of entry for ideas and suggestions;

a point of entry for ideas on improving a specific aspect; and

a point of entry for third party submissions.

Claim 10. (Canceled)

11. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 2, further comprising:

an acknowledgement module for automatic emailing of specific types of suggestions to specific areas of responsibility within a company.

12. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 2, further comprising:

a status module that tracks progression of a suggestion through a review, comment, and approval process.

13. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 2, further comprising:

a statistics module that reports cumulative submissions in a predetermined format.

14. (Currently Amended) A network-based application that allows employees to submit suggestions and ideas for improving how a company does business, comprising:

a central portal for receiving suggestions from a submitting party on behalf of a receiving party;

multiple points of entry comprising innovation groups within said receiving party to which said suggestions can be routed from said central portal and which can also receive said suggestions directly; and

a routing mechanism that routes said suggestions to a most appropriate one or more of said multiple points of entry in response to an interaction with said submitting party;

a search mechanism that automatically searches for previously-submitted suggestions that are potentially related to the new suggestion and displays the results of the search to the submitting party;

a selection mechanism allowing the submitting party to select and comment on any of the displayed previously-submitted suggestions that the submitting party determines to be similar to the new suggestion, whereby the new suggestion is linked to any previously-submitted suggestions that are selected by the submitting party, such that the selected previously-submitted suggestions will be cross-referenced with the new suggestion.

~~wherein said multiple points of entry comprise any of:~~

~~an entry portal, which is a single point of entry to said network-based application;~~

~~a point of entry for employees within a specific business unit in a larger entity for submission of suggestions related to said business unit;~~

~~a point of entry for motivated submitters with an idea about how to change a business practice of said company;~~

~~a central point of entry for ideas and suggestions;~~

~~a point of entry for viewing previously submitted suggestions and allowing a comment to be added to at least one of said previously submitted suggestions in lieu of a submission of a new suggestion;~~

~~a point of entry for ideas on improving a specific aspect of said company;~~

~~and~~

~~a point of entry for third party submissions.~~

15. (Original) The application of Claim 14, wherein, for each suggestion any of the following types of information to be attached to said suggestion:

a review comment;

a peer review comment;

a link to a document or presentation; and

a related idea.

16. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
a torchbearer function performed by an executive participant and advocate in said application.
17. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
a view module that allows viewing of a list of latest submissions.
18. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
a view module that, for said central portal, returns a list of submissions to all points of entry; and that, for said points of entry, returns a list of submissions to an appropriate innovation group.
19. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
a search module that allows entry of search criteria to return a list of matching submissions.
20. (Original) The application of Claim 19, said search module comprising any of:
a search for submissions a user has submitted;
a search for submissions said user has saved but not submitted; and
a search of an implementation zone for ideas that have been approved, but for which there are no current resources to implement.
21. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
a submission dialog comprising one or more qualification questions.
22. (Original) The application of Claim 21, wherein said one or more qualification questions determine a submitting party's desired degree of ownership of an implementation process for said submitting party's suggestion.
23. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
an adoption module for soliciting sponsorship of an unowned suggestion.

24. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
a steering committee that receives, reviews, and disposes of suggestions.
25. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
a peer rating module that allows individuals to rate suggestions.
26. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
a statistics module by which statistics are provided based upon suggestions submitted over various time intervals and by point of entry.
27. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
a status table for displaying actions taken or to be taken, based upon any of point of entry and category.
28. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
a related suggestion link wherein a related suggestion is located and a user is asked to confirm if said suggestion is similar to a suggestion submitted or to be submitted by said user or not and, if not, optionally to indicate why.
29. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
a dialog by which customer testimonials are captured.
30. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
a link within a network page that takes a user directly to a suggestion submission dialog.
31. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
an incentive module that implements an incentive program.

32. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
a page that provides contact information.
33. (Original) The application of Claim 14, further comprising:
an award module with which award winners are listed.
34. (Currently Amended) A storage medium comprising a computer implemented process stored therein, said process comprising a network-based application that allows employees to submit suggestions and ideas for improving how a company does business, said process comprising:
providing a portal through which a submitting party can submit an new suggestion; ~~multiple portals;~~
directing the ~~new suggestion~~ suggestions to an innovation zone, a most appropriate portal, such that ~~they are~~ the new suggestion is considered by most appropriate persons; and
searching for previously-submitted suggestions that are potentially related to the new suggestion;
displaying any potentially-related previously-submitted suggestions to the submitting party;
allowing the submitting party to ~~viewing and~~ comment on the displayed previously submitted suggestions; ~~said suggestions before the suggestions are considered.~~
allowing the submitting party to select any of the displayed previously-submitted suggestions that are deemed by the submitting party to be similar to the new suggestion;
and
linking said new suggestion to the selected previously-submitted suggestions,
whereby said selected previously-submitted suggestions will be cross-referenced with the new suggestion.

Claims 35-36. (Canceled).

37. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for receiving and processing suggestions, comprising;

central portal means for receiving a new suggestion ~~suggestions~~ from a submitting party on behalf of a receiving party;

a plurality of innovation zone means within said receiving party to which said new suggestion ~~suggestions~~ can be routed; and

means for routing said new suggestion ~~suggestions~~ to one or more of said innovation zones in response to an interaction with said submitting party; and

means for automatically displaying previously-submitted suggestions to the submitting party that are potentially related to the new suggestion;

means for allowing the submitting party to comment on the displayed previously-submitted suggestions; and ~~any of said suggestions to be linked to any other of said suggestions.~~

means for allowing the submitting party to select any of the displayed previously-submitted suggestions that are deemed by the submitting party to be similar to the new suggestion, whereby the new suggestion is linked to the selected previously-submitted suggestions, such that the selected previously-submitted suggestions are cross-referenced with the new suggestion.

Claims 38-39. (Canceled)

40. (Currently Amended) A network-based process that allows employees to submit suggestions and ideas for improving how a company does business, comprising:

providing a central portal for receiving a new suggestion ~~suggestions~~ from an employee ~~a submitting party on behalf of a receiving party;~~

providing multiple points of entry comprising innovation groups ~~within said receiving party~~ to which said suggestions can be routed from said central portal and which can also receive said suggestions directly; and

routing said new suggestion ~~suggestions~~ to a most appropriate one or more of said multiple points of entry in response to an interaction with said employee ~~submitting party;~~

searching for previously-submitted suggestions that are potentially related to the new suggestion and displaying the results to the employee;

allowing the employee to select and comment on any of the displayed previously-submitted suggestions that the employee believes to be related to the new suggestion; and

linking the new suggestion to any of the displayed previously-submitted suggestions that are selected by the employee, such that a subsequent viewer of the new suggestion will also see the selected previously-submitted suggestions.

~~wherein said multiple points of entry comprise any of:~~

~~an entry portal, which is a single point of entry to said network-based application;~~

~~a point of entry for employees within a specific business unit in a larger entity for submission of suggestions related to said business unit;~~

~~a point of entry for motivated submitters with an idea about how to change said company's business;~~

~~a central point of entry for ideas and suggestions;~~

~~a point of entry for ideas on improving a specific aspect of said company;~~

~~and~~

~~a point of entry for third-party submissions.~~

41. (Original) The process of Claim 40, wherein for each suggestion any of the following types of information to be attached to said suggestion:

a review comment;

a peer review comment;

a link to a document or presentation; and a related idea.

42. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:

providing a torchbearer function performed by an executive participant and advocate in said application.

43. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:

providing a view module that allows viewing of a list of latest submissions.

44. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:
providing a view module that, for said central portal, returns a list of submissions to all points of entry; and that, for said points of entry, returns a list of submissions to an appropriate innovation group.
45. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:
providing a search module that allows entry of search criteria to return a list of matching submissions.
46. (Original) The process of Claim 45, said search module comprising any of:
searching for submissions a user has submitted;
searching for submissions said user has saved but not submitted; and
searching an implementation zone for ideas that have been approved, but
for which there are no current resources to implement.
47. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:
providing a submission dialog comprising one or more qualification questions.
48. (Original) The process of Claim 47, wherein said one or more qualification questions determine a submitting party's desired degree of ownership of an implementation process for said submitting party's suggestion.
49. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:
providing an adoption module for soliciting sponsorship of an unowned suggestion.
50. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:
providing a steering committee that receives, reviews, and disposes of suggestions.

51. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:
providing a peer rating module that allows individuals to rate suggestions.
52. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:
a statistics module by which statistics are provided based upon suggestions
submitted over various time intervals and by point of entry.
53. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:
providing a status table for displaying actions taken or to be taken, based upon
any of point of entry and category.
54. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:
providing a related suggestion link wherein a related suggestion is located and a
user is asked to confirm if said suggestion is similar to a suggestion submitted or to be
submitted by said user or not and, if not, optionally to indicate why.
55. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:
providing a dialog by which customer testimonials are captured.
56. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:
providing a link within a network page that takes a user directly to a suggestion
submission dialog.
57. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:
providing an incentive module that implements an incentive program.
58. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:
providing a page that provides contact information.
59. (Original) The process of Claim 40, further comprising:
providing an award module with which award winners are listed.